DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 084 241 SP 007 476

AUTHOR Gantt, Walter N.; Davey, Beth
TITLE Pre-Student Teachers React to Field-Supplemented Methods Courses.
PUB DATE [72]
NOTE 14p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *College School Cooperation; Curriculum Planning; Elementary Schools; Feedback; *Field Experience Programs; *Methods Courses; *Preservice Education; Student Reaction; Teacher Supervision; *Teaching Experience

ABSTRACT

This document on the value of field experience for preservice teachers is based on a course and an experiment conducted at the University of Maryland in which blocks of a methods course were devoted to elementary school classroom experience. It is reported that school visits progressively involved observation lesson presentation, and general assistance of the classroom teacher; each school visit was concluded with a feedback seminar to which the principal, students, and college instructors contributed. Findings of a three-part evaluative form administered to each student at the conclusion of the field experience are discussed. Supportive tables are included. The conclusions indicate a strong mandate in support of pre-student teaching field experience and increased student confidence about their readiness for student teaching. It is admitted that the implementation of such a program would involve increased planning time by the college instructor and a shifting of his role from supervisor to resource consultant. The resulting advantages listed are student self-learning and self-evaluation, and increased creative curriculum planning. (JA)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

266

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED 084241

Dr. Walter N. Gantt
Dr. Beth Davey
University of Maryland
College Park

College of Ed.

Pre-Student Teachers React to Field-Supplemented Methods Courses*

It is a widely accepted objective of instructors of methods courses for pre-service teachers to provide as much experience as possible in the schools. The value of early student contact with pupils and teachers in classrooms to test ideas and theories taught in college methods classes seems indisputable. As phrased by one writer, "It is as irrational to rely on the student teaching period to give education students the true picture as it would be to postpone a medical student's first encounter with surgery until he interns" (Wagoner:68). Despite its obvious value and increasing reports of its observance, there is limited objective data in the educational literature about the effects of and reactions to early field experience for the education student prior to student teaching.

There is abundant evidence to support the notion that pre-service, in-service and graduate students of teaching are helped to develop specific teaching strategies using micro-teaching techniques (Anderson and Antes). Even a single, brief teaching experience of fifteen minutes has been reported as having value in sharpening students' perceptions of themselves

SP 007 476

*Appreciation is expressed by the authors to Mr. Stanley J. Klein and his faculty at Springhill Lake Elementary School, Prince Georges County, Maryland for their contributions to this study.

as potential teachers and in assisting them in making career decisions (Newlove and Fuller:339). Yet one of the few descriptive reports of a structured program of coordinating theory, observation and participation within the school setting prior to student teaching concludes with only an endorsement of the program and an observation that an empirically tested evaluation must be conducted in the future (Walsh).

Years ago Dewey cautioned against acceptance of an experience as worthwhile merely for the sake of having the experience. He proposed that there is a need for noting the characteristics of situations in which the applications of theory in practice are identified, and he suggested criteria by which their educational value can be determined:

> ...ideas or hypotheses are tested by the consequences which they produce when they are acted upon. This fact means that the consequence of action must be carefully and discriminatingly observed. Activity that is not checked by observation of what follows from it may be temporarily enjoyed. But intellectually it leads nowhere. It does not provide knowledge about the situations in which action occurs nor does it lead to the classification and expansion of ideas.(Dewey:110)

A possible "expansion of ideas" to which Dewey refers is suggested by several statements made in a report by Roy Edelfelt following a conference on innovative programs on student teaching sponsored by the Maryland State Superintendent of Schools and funded by the U.S. Office of Education:

> The collaboration of schools and colleges is essential to improving not only practicum experience but the whole process of education... College and school people cannot work closely together without changing each other. The prospects of welding theory and practice together in effective and fruitful ways in teacher education holds promise which goes further than anything yet achieved either in schools of education or in public schools. (Edelfelt, et.al.:146)

Setting up the machinery for the collaborative activity with the schools, scheduling of students, and conferring with teachers and other staff personnel is a time consuming enterprise which can be justified only in terms of beneficial outcomes from the field experience for the pre-service teachers, children and the school and college personnel. As an assessment of the "consequences of action", as suggested by Dewey, this study represents a step toward objective appraisal of student and cooperating teachers' reactions to one pre-student teaching program of methods courses combined with field experiences.

Description of the Program

Undergraduate elementary majors in the University of Maryland's College of Education have the option of taking their methods courses in blocked sections taught by teams of curriculum specialists. The following is a report of the reactions of classes totalling forty junior students, and five methods teachers, who were blocked for reading, language arts and social studies. Each blocked section met twice a week for a three-hour period. In a typical section during the semester under study, four of the 29 three-hour sessions, or twelve hours, were devoted to elementary school classroom experiences. Eighteen teachers at two elementary schools were involved in the study.

The announced objective of the school-based phase of the methods courses was: "To provide observational and teaching

experience for the student in elementary language arts, reading, and social studies; emphasis should not be focused on the refinement of teaching skills, but rather on familiarization with pupil and classroom behaviors". The authors planned to evaluate the blocked methods courses supplemented with field experience by obtaining answers to the following questions which, they felt, were needed to guide future curriculum planning:

1. At the conclusion of the courses, how confident did the student feel about his ability to apply course content when he would enter student teaching?
2. What were the student's attitudes about the relationship and value of the school field experience to his methods courses?

Several planning meetings were held with the principals, classroom teachers and college instructors to set up guidelines for the elementary classroom visitations. These guidelines were communicated to the students. Before and during the school visits, the methods instructors were available for resource services. While key observations were conducted by the college instructors, no attempt was made to observe each student in all phases of his school participation. Each student had a specific plan of operation and it was his responsibility to evaluate the extent to which he was successful with this plan.

The four school visits were organized within the following framework:

Visit One:

Students met with the principal to discuss general concerns relating to school philosophy and organization. Students

observed demonstration lessons (i.e. language experience approaches), observed general classroom behaviors and organization, and met with their teacher to plan a lesson.

Visit Two:

Students further observed classroom interactions and assisted the teacher with various activities. The students taught one lesson independently, to a small group of children.

Visit Three:

Students again observed a demonstration lesson (i.e. inquiry approaches, directed reading activities) and assisted the teacher in the classroom. The students planned again with the teacher for a final lesson to be presented.

Visit Four:

Students presented a lesson and further assisted the teacher with routines, playground activities, tutoring and related instructional duties. Learning centers and instructional materials made by the students were contributed to the classroom. Classroom teachers and students conferenced together to evaluate the total experience.

Each school visit was concluded with a feedback seminar to which the principal, students, and college instructors contributed. Students were able to discuss their concerns at this time, or could use personal reaction cards to relay their feelings to the instructors. This feedback was one means of responding to individual problems and needs, adding to the flexibility of the program. The feedback also provided the instructors with ideas and topics for

follow-up activities for the on-campus methods courses.

Data Collection

A three part evaluative form was administered to each student at the conclusion of the field experience. Parts A and B were check lists. Part A was designed to find out how confident the student felt about his ability to apply ideas stressed in the methods course to his forthcoming student teaching experience. The instrument provided for six categories of graded response. Part B was designed to measure the extent to which the field experience was perceived as a valuable part of the methods course. Categories identical to those in Part A were included. Part C was designed to give the student an opportunity to comment fully on any of his reactions to the program.

Cooperating teachers in the school in which the field study was conducted gave written responses to the following questions:

1. How effective do you think this experience is, as a step in helping to prepare the student for classroom teaching?
2. What recommendations would you make to the University advisors for planning future programs such as this one?

Responses to the above questions and check lists provided the descriptive data for this study.

Findings

Table I presents responses of the forty students to the question of how confident they felt about their ability to apply ideas or procedures presented in their methods courses combined with field experiences. As revealed in the tabulation of responses,

a large proportion of their checked comments, 65 per cent, were in the "very much so" and "much so" columns. Twenty-eight per cent of the responses were in the "somewhat" column and only 7 per cent felt less than somewhat confident or did not respond.

When the students were asked how they felt about the value of the field experiences in relation to the methods courses, their attitudes, as reflected in Table II, were overwhelmingly positive. Sixty-five per cent of the responses were in the "very much so" column; an additional 27 per cent were in the "much so" column. Approximately 8 per cent checked reactions in the "somewhat, "little", or "not at all" categories, or failed to respond to specific items.

These responses suggest that the courses had a degree of positive impact which transcended usual student attributions of "irrelevance" to their methods courses.

TABLE I

STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE-FEELINGS OF CONFIDENCE ABOUT ABILITY TO APPLY COURSE CONTENT IN STUDENT TEACHING

Directions:

The following topics were covered in your methods courses. Please rate them according to your feeling of confidence in applying these ideas or procedures in a student teaching situation.

TOPICS	1 VERY MUCH SO	2 MUCH SO	3 SOME-WHAT	4 A LITTLE	5 NOT AT ALL	6 NO RESP.	7 NO. OF STUD.
1. sensitivity to individual differences	12	18	9	1	0	0	40
2. effective grouping arrangements	3	19	17	1	0	0	40
3. Construction and use of materials (learning centers, etc.)	11	16	11	2	0	0	40
4. Strategies for individualized instruction	3	18	15	2	0	2	40
5. language experience approaches	19	18	3	0	0	0	40
6. language arts activities	11	19	9	0	0	1	40
7. directed reading activities	7	16	14	2	0	1	40
8. inquiry approaches	12	11	8	9	0	0	40
9. questioning techniques	9	13	11	6	0	1	40
10. inductive approaches (i.e. word attack)	4	15	18	2	0	1	40
11. strategies for planning an individual lesson	13	12	8	1	0	1	40
TOTAL RESPONSES	104	180	123	26	0	7	440
PER CENT OF GRAND TOTAL	24	41	28	6	0	1	100

TABLE II

STUDENT QUESTIONAIRE-ATTITUDE ABOUT VALUE OF FIELD EXPERIENCE IN RELATION TO CONTENT OF METHODS COURSES

Directions:

Please check the column which corresponds to your reaction to the field experience.

TOPICS	1 VERY MUCH SO	2 MUCH SO	3 SOME-WHAT	4 A LITTLE	5 NOT AT ALL	6 NO RESP.	7 NO. OF STUD.
1. Was the purpose of the activity clear?	22	15	2	0	0	1	40
2. Do you feel that it should be repeated another semester?	30	6	2	1	1	0	40
3. Do you think that it was a valuable way to use part of the time allotted to methods courses?	32	6	1	1	0	0	40
4. Was the activity related to course content and emphasis?	20	16	3	1	0	0	40
TOTAL RESPONSES	104	43	8	3	1	1	160
PER CENT OF GRAND TOTAL	65	27	5	2	.6	.6	100

A survey of the specific comments made by the students reveal in a more explicit manner their positive perceptions of the total experience. They were asked to discuss fully, in writing, the following question:

> Considering that you have student teaching ahead of you, how effective do you think the field experience was in helping you to understand, to evaluate, and to apply the ideas discussed in your methods courses?

The answers are summarized in descending frequency of response by the students:

1. Relationships between theory and practice were observed

2. Direct experience in applying theoretical ideas about teaching was provided.

3. Student perspective of children and learning was increased.

4. The importance of classroom teachers as resource personnel was recognized.

5. Opportunity was provided to work in an atmosphere free of pressure and external evaluation.

6. Insight and confidence were given about one's potential teaching ability.

7. There were opportunities to observe various techniques useful in controlling a classroom.

8. The experience was a valid introduction to teaching.

9. Opportunities were provided for students to plan and execute lessons on related subjects.

The data in Tables I andII show that a minority of the students had reservations about the program. Their specific comments offer perceptions which merit consideration as program objectives are appraised:

1. Preparation for work with children added to the quantity of work required in the course.

2. It was difficult to plan for strange children.

3. Benefits gained were dependent upon the attitude of the

cooperating teacher to whom one was assigned.

4. Not enough time was spent in the school.

5. The field experience should be in more than one type of school.

6. Too much time was spent in observation.

The responses show that some students, despite the announced objective of the pre-student teaching field experience, may still have expected an involvement which would be more characteristic of student teaching. There are also implications that student competencies and interests vary even at this level, and that individual differences should be recognized in program planning.

Conclusions and Implications for Teacher Education Programming

The one overarching feature of the program was that it was not one to which most students reacted with indifference. Feelings were definite - either enthusiastically positive - or negative.

A strong mandate in support of the pre-student teaching field experience seems apparent. Feelings of confidence about readiness for student teaching were expressed by the students as a consequence of the combination of theoretical input, direct field experiences, and critical group discussions. Evidence was obtained that schools and the university can mutually plan and execute a satisfying and successful teacher education program combining field and methodological components.

It should be noted that a program of this type adds to the planning time of the college instructor. However, the overall

effects more than compensate for the extra effort involved. In addition to the avenues which are opened for increasing the cooperative ventures of the public schools and teacher education institutions, an opportunity is afforded to significantly change the role of the college methods instructors and to redesign the nature of their contributions in the field. Traditionally, they have operated as supervisors to see that the student teacher does as he has been taught. Consequently, results have frequently been less than satisfying. By shifting the methods instructors' roles from supervisors to resource consultants, interesting possibilities for changes in teacher education are introduced.

First, in a program such as this, there is an emphasis on student self-learning and self-evaluation. He is regarded as a mature person with a personal stake in his development. Opportunities are provided for him to seek answers to his own questions through observing, participating, and conferencing. Second, with the classroom teacher a cooperative partner in the enterprise, the college methods instructor has expanded opportunities for creative planning, testing of hypotheses, and contributing to curriculum development and the improvement of learning. Third, and foremost, educational opportunities are increased for the child who is, in the final analysis, the focus of these efforts.

At the beginning of the in-school experience some apprehension was felt by the college instructors that classroom teachers might consider the program an added burden. Such a concern proved

unwarranted in view of the enthusiastic endorsement which was given by the school personnel who were involved. The comments of one teacher is a typical reaction:

> I feel that the field experience is a valuable means of exposing future educators to an actual teaching situation. So many times courses tend to be idealistic in outlook. It takes exposure to real children to know what to expect. The students seemed to develop a certain self confidence after their experience. The school children were enthusiastic about being taught by someone new. The experience proved beneficial to them.

Some teachers even suggested that more time for student participation be provided in the school during the next school year.

Recommendations

This descriptive study strongly suggests that elementary school classroom field experiences do add an important dimension to college methods courses. Students express feelings of confidence about their potential functioning in student-teaching, and these classroom experiences, when carefully planned, are perceived by them as a valuable part of methods courses.

Because of the positive attitudes which were revealed by this study, it is recommended that field experiences be incorporated into all methods course programs. However, sufficient time must be allowed for in-class discussion and demonstration of methods and materials. A laboratory period, perhaps once a week, to supplement the regular coursework, could involve the students in public schools in a meaningful way. A select few basic strategies might be demonstrated in the school classroom by the teacher, to be practiced and refined by the undergraduate students. A formal

in-service program involving the classroom teachers and university personnel could be established to encourage better understanding of techniques, sharing of creative ideas, and discussion of instructional questions. One aspect of this in-service program, then, would be the classroom teachers' demonstration of methods to the undergraduate students and assisting them in practicing their skills.

In the area of research, clearly, more reporting of existing programs is needed. In further studies, measurement of attitudes of students during their practice teaching and first year teaching experiences would be helpful to assess the long range effects of the classroom field experience program.

References:

Anderson, Dan W. and Antes, John M. "Micro Teaching for Preparing Teachers of Culturally Diverse Children", The Elementary School Journal, 72:142-49

Dewey, John. Experience and Education. New York: The MacMillan Company, 1948.

Edelfelt, Roy A., Editor. The Role of the State Educational Agency in The Development of Innovative Programs in Student-Teaching. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Teacher Education and Professional Standards of the National Education Association, 1969.

Newlove, Beulah W. and Fuller, Frances F. "The 15-Minute Hour: A Brief Teaching Experience". The Journal of Teacher Education. 22:335-40, Fall 1971.

Walsh, Huber M. "Let's Move the Methods Course Off Campus". The Journal of Teacher Education. 21:347-51; Fall 1970.

Wagoner, Jennings L. "Let's Teach What We Practice". The Educational Forum. 30:67-9; November 1965.